



Christ our sin bearer

***'Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree,
that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness:
by whose stripes ye were healed.'***

(1 Peter 2:24)

Some of the most characteristic definitions of Christ's atoning accomplishment are given in appeals to believers to practise the most elementary virtues of their high and holy and heavenly vocation:

Mark 10:43: *'Whosoever would be great among you, let him be your minister. And whosoever would be chief, shall be servant of all'*. 2 Corinthians 8:8-9: — Christian liberality — *'I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ'*.

Philippians 2:6-8: *'Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'*. Consequently, *'Look not every man on his own things but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus'* (Philippians 2:4-5).

So in our text — 1 Peter 2:21-23: *'For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.'*

This does not mean that we follow Christ in performing his unique and peculiar work, nor that we participate with him in it. He is our supreme example in the vocation that belongs to us and not in the vocation that was uniquely his. *'Be ye followers of me even as I also am of Christ'*, said Paul (1 Corinthians 11:1). This distinction is inscribed eloquently on our text. There are three observations:

1. Christ alone bore sins

'Who his own self bore our sins'. The Father laid on him the iniquity of us all. He made him to be sin. It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief. He did not spare. *'Awake, O sword against my shepherd'*.¹ But the Father was not the sin-bearer. The Holy Spirit was given to Christ without measure and through the eternal Spirit Christ offered himself without spot to God.² But the Spirit was not the sin-bearer. The angelic host is also excluded. Gabriel could not bear sin. The holiest of men are excluded. Oh, one drop of expiatory damnation would have crushed the mightiest of the angelic host and the holiest of men. It is only by his stripes we are healed. Calvary does not exemplify something. It is not the supreme example of vicarious sacrifice. It is the one solitary event without duplication or repetition in heaven, earth, or hell.

2. Christ Himself bore sin

Our attention is drawn to his *person* in its unity and integrity. He offered himself without spot to God (Hebrews 9:14). Perhaps you have heard or read such a formula as this: *'He offered his humanity on the altar of his divinity'*. If so, do not accept it. Reject it and do so with decisive recoil. It was in human nature that he bore sin. But it was the Son of God in human nature. *'When he had by*

himself purged our sins he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high' (Hebrews 1:3). *'Now once in the end of the world hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself'* (Hebrews 9:26). In this text our attention is drawn to Calvary: *'In his own body upon the tree'*. It was then he poured out his soul unto death, then he dismissed his spirit to the Father, then he fulfilled the climactic requirement of his mission and commission in accordance with his own word in John 10:17, 18:

'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.'

It is true the cross must not be isolated from the rest of our Lord's life. He learned obedience from the things he suffered. He was made perfect through sufferings (Hebrews 5:8-9). But all of this was directed to the climax of dying upon the accursed tree. To this Peter draws our attention.

3. Christ bore our sins

It is all-important to bear in mind that Jesus bore the penalty of sin. Death is the wages of sin and Jesus died. The essence of the penalty is the wrath of God. He is the propitiation of that wrath. Sin's penalty is abandonment, and that he bore, crying out:

'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' 'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.'

(Isaiah 53:5)

But our understanding is greatly impoverished if we do not take account of the pervasive witness that he bore *sins*. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. His soul was made an offering for sin. He bore the sin of many. He was made sin. We miss something central to the whole doctrine of his sin-bearing if we restrict our thought to the penalty of sin.

When you are convicted of sin, what looms highest in your apprehension and what is deepest in your conviction? It is not sin's penalty. *It is sin as offence against God*. It is sin in all its gravity *as offence* that Jesus bore. He did no sin, Peter says. But he came into the closest relation to sin possible without becoming sinful. He bore sin in all its offence and liability and so he made an end of sin. This is why we may take the cup of blessing. His was the cup of curse, ours of blessing, his of damnation, ours of salvation, his of sins to be expiated, ours of remission, his of bitterness, ours of sweetness, his of wrath outpoured, ours of propitiation, his of abandonment, ours of fellowship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Exhortation

'That we having died to the sins might live unto righteousness'. This is the purpose and it is an unfailing issue. If we are in the class of those spoken of in the first half of Peter's words, then we are also embraced in this purpose.

This is more generally Paul's doctrine. But it appears here in Peter and in 1 Peter 4:1, 2:

'Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin: That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.'

What is this doctrine? It is this: that those for whom Christ died, died with him and rose with him to newness of life. And what does it mean? They died to sins. They no longer live in the realm of sin. Sin shall not have the dominion. This is true of sin indwelling and sin committed. And the newness of life which results is that of righteousness.

What are the lessons?

The *first* is: *encouragement*. If Christ is all to you, remember he has the dominion. He has the citadel of your heart and no sin has the dominion.

The *second* is: *reckon on this fact*. Do not think you live in the realm of sin —

'Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin: That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.'

(1 Peter 4:1-2)

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¹ Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:10; Romans 8:32; Zechariah 13:7.

² John 3:34; Hebrews 9:14.